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DON'T LET THIS HAPPEN AGAIN!

A TRUE STORY
BY SURVIVOR
SASHA SEMENOFF

My name is Sasha Semenoff alias Abram Schapiro. I am a Holocaust survivor from Riga Latvia. I am the son of Paul and Hanny Schapiro.

To remember what happened ~~forty~~-sixty years ago seems pretty difficult. I recall growing up in a wonderful, Jewish family with beautiful parents and grandparents; a large family with Passover Seders and high holidays and happy a Jewish upbringing. I remember my Bar Mitzvah and I remember being a normal teenager going to a private Jewish public school and a private Jewish highschool with highschool fraternities and lots of friends and summers at the beach and living a normal life in a normal society. It all seemed very sudden when I look back. As a teenager I did not understand most of the events of war. I was only fifteen years old at the time. I read about the things that were happening in Germany. I heard about it from German-Jewish immigrants that came to Riga in the late thirties, but as a kid I never thought this could happen to us.

Life took a drastic change in 1940 when Communistic revolution occurred in Latvia. One day I recall the Soviet army marching into our city along with the Communist party members and Communist youth marching into our streets, taking over this country from us and our life changed terribly. That's when it all began in 1940.

My immediate family consisted of my sister, Selma, who was a year and a half older than myself and my young parents. They were both in their early forties, forty to be exact. Then I suddenly realized the impact of war. No more Zionistic highschool fraternity, no more high holiday feasts and gatherings, on the high holidays. It made a change in our school system, a change in my Father's position at work. Lots of our friends were sent to Siberia and it was the beginning of a very miserable life with much more to follow.

SISTER SELMA FATHER PINCHUS-PAUL MOTHER HANNY



THIS IS THE LAST
PICTURE TAKEN
ON SEPT. 20, 1940
MY 16TH BIRTHDAY

When the Germans were getting closer and neared our borders we all practiced to go to our shelters in our buildings. Every day we heard the bombings. I remember standing guard in our building and it was the first time I heard a bomb dropping just a few blocks away from our house. It had hit an Army hospital. German collaborators kept shooting from the windows and rooftops. Just before the German occupation the Soviets were beginning to descent their troops and lots of the Jewish people were anticipating the future and went away with the Russian troops. My sister who was a medical student had a chance to run away with the Russian troops and begged us to go along with the Red Cross truck, but my parents said, "No, we'll stay here". They did not make a wise decision.

We saw my sister off. This was just a few days before ^{the} German occupation and our family was minus my sister who was gone; we had no idea where she was going to but they took off with the Russian troops. Also, all the young boys, were called by the Army recruits to hold off the German troops while the Russian troops were evacuating. I was supposed to report to Russian Headquarters and they gave us guns, ammunition and put us into a truck and we were supposed to go to a certain area by the bridge to fight the German troops. We called it Cannon Fetter.

One of my friends was very much aware of the situation. His name was Rosenstein. Rosenstein's Fathers said, "Don't be a fool, go home you are going to be killed". I won't allow my son to go there". He said, "Leave your gun here and go home". I felt it was the right thing to do. I really didn't feel very wrong about it because I knew that we could not hold off the German troops and sure enough all the kids that were drafted were all killed.

On July 2, 1941 the Nazis occupied Latvia. I saw it with my own eyes, just as I saw the Russian troops walk in in 1940. I saw them run and I saw the German troops march in, That was the beginning of our Holocaust. We tried to resume our lives as usual and my Dad wanted to go to work in the morning just as he always did. I neglected to mention that during the Russian occupation in 1940 I was forced to go to work and attend night school. I worked in the same Textile company with my Dad. We went to work on the 3rd of July as we usually did every morning and as we arrived at the place of business the Latvian collaborators, the Latvian Aisargi, Perkonkrustinieks and some of the German officers were waiting at the gate and they were screening the Jews from the Gentile employees. We were put on a truck and we were sent to the bridge where the last battle had taken place; where I was supposed to have fought off the German Troops. There were hundreds of bodies of young kids, and young soldiers. Our job was to clean up the bodies and throw them into the truck.

I can still remember the horrible smell. We were all covered in mud and we worked until dawn in this horrible, horrible battlefield. It was my first really horrifying experience of the war. I remember thinking to myself that I could have been one of those bodies. I did not recognize anyone, thank God. All I saw was mud covered soldiers. We had to clean them, hose them down and load them in the truck. Then we were taken back to our homes.

I remember my Father and I trying to clean ourselves, and wash ourselves and take a bath after this horrible experience. We were barely done doing that and there was a knock at the door. We opened the door and saw Latvian soldiers and some German Nazis in Nazi uniforms. They ordered all the Jewish males to get dressed and go downstairs. We looked out the window of our apartment building and all the Jewish men from our building and the neighboring buildings were lined up out in the street. Since I was very short and only sixteen years old, I looked much younger than my age and I was left with my Mother. They only wanted able bodied Jewish men to line up in the streets. My Dad showed his ID since he was a Latvian Freedom Fighter from World War I and they laughed in his face and said that doesn't do you any good you are a Jew. And, after going through this horrible day on this horrible battle field he had to get dressed and line up with the rest of the men and we never saw him since. We found out later that all these men were taken to be killed. They supposedly were taken to jail in and hard labor.

We used to go down to the corner and every now and then saw a truck pass by filled with men with coal covered faces hoping to see our Dad, but we couldn't recognize any of these faces. We threw some sandwiches and bits of food with notes hoping that my Father would see it. The trucks stopped coming. It was the first mass killing, the first big pogrom. The Jewish men were killed by the Nazis and the Latvian collaborators.

Now the next thing was the order for all Jews to wear a Star of David on the left side of their clothing and on the back. And, we had no more right to walk on the sidewalk, we had to walk in the gutter. Also, they started taking people out of their apartments and putting them together in one apartment because they were taking over the Jewish apartments for some of their SS and Latvian Nazi personnel. After a few days of the German occupation the famous Latvian, Herbert Cukurs came to our apartment and gave the order for us to evacuate the apartment and to move downstairs to a neighbor. He liked our apartment and wanted to occupy it for his own living quarters. He did so within a few days, kept all our belongings, all our furniture, all our valuables. We were

only allowed a few things to carry out of our apartment - the necessary things. We were told to stay downstairs with our neighbors until further notice.

Then the next thing he did was put me to work in his garage at the headquarters of the Latvian Aisargi Perkonkrustniek organization and he was the top officer of this outfit. I did so and went to work in the morning and had to clean up the garage, help wash the cars, motorcycles and trucks.

The Latvian soldiers that were working for this outfit, were the Latvian Nationalists that were joining the Nazis to do all the dirty work - killing the Jews, digging the graves - that was their work. We saw them drunk, taking off with their shovels and coming back with blood stains on the trucks and their shovels. We knew what their job consisted of.

At night Cukurs would have me come up to my own apartment and play the piano for him while he was entertaining his whores. He also told my Mother that he saw the list on the people killed and my Dad was amongst them. After the war Herbert Cukurs was executed by the Israeli group that said we will never forget.

The next thing was ^{the} Ghetto. A very poor neighborhood was fenced off with barbed wire and an order came down for all the remaining Jews to be moved to that Ghetto. The conditions there were very poor. The housing was very bad and they moved us into these very, very neglected quarters and we marched through the city with our remaining belongings, as much as we could possibly carry, some food and some clothing. It was a very long walk to the Ghetto and I remember my Mother and I walking in line and little by little we had to drop some of the things we carried because they were just too heavy.

When we got to the Ghetto it was the end of November, 1941. They separated the men from the women; the working Ghetto, that they called the Male Ghetto and the old, larger part of the Ghetto was the women's and children's Ghetto. My Mom begged me please to go to the men's Ghetto because I had a better chance of surviving and she was right. That night the 30th of November they had the first Pogrom. The first massacring of thousands of Jewish women and children from the Ghetto who were taken out to be killed. I remember saying goodbye to my Mother and going back and forth to the little apartment where she stayed and I finally was pulled by the guards into the male Ghetto. I found a place with some of my friends, where we stayed, four or five guys, I don't remember exactly, in one room. That night we heard shooting and we knew that it was the shooting that was taking place on the

outskirts of town. We could hear them - actually hear them - killing our women, and I was sure that my Mother was amongst them. The next morning we were told that there were still some survivors and they were keeping a lot of women for the next Pogrom. I snuck out the men's Ghetto and found my Mother still alive amongst the other remaining women in the Ghetto. It was a joy but we knew it was just temporary. Every day I kept going back to the women's Ghetto and I think about a week later the second Pogrom occurred. There was a lot of excitement going on in the Ghetto. The police security kept telling us to quick go back because this was the night they were going to kill the rest of the women. And those children who remained with their parents would be amongst them. So, I knew that this was the last time that I would ever see my Mother and I kissed her goodbye and I went back a few times and I knew this was the last time I would see her. That night again we heard shooting. Evidently, the mass killings that were going on were not very far from the Ghetto. I remember crying that I would never see my Mother again. The next morning the women's Ghetto was empty. They had killed the rest of the women. In the meantime, after our women were shot and killed some of them were evacuated to the jail and some came to work in Nazi factories, but my Mother was not amongst them. Ironically, they brought in transports, thousands and thousands of German Jews and Austrian Jews and they put them in the Riga Ghetto. It was a separate Ghetto - They called it the German Jewish Ghetto.

Every morning there was roll call and we were lined up and taken to work in different parts of town under guard and returned to the Ghetto at night. When we lined up for work we used to look across the barbed wire and see the German Jews lining up and trying to talk to us and wave to us we knew that they were happy to see us and we were happy to see them even though our women were killed and they were brought in in their place. We tried to make friends with the Jews in the German Ghetto. The men were trying to talk with the women and find ways of meeting them outside of work and we even found ways of sneaking through the barbed wire and going over to the German Ghetto. Of course, this was very dangerous and if you were caught you would be shot or put in solitaire but we did it anyway; we had nothing to lose. Since our families were gone we wanted to make some friends with some German Jewish families and we did. And this went on for awhile. Many boys met some of the German Jewish girls and under the circumstances even fell in love. And, quite a few of them were lucky enough to survive and remained married after the war.

I met a little girl from Hanover. Her name was Rita Lerner. Unfortunately, she did not survive. We became very close. Later on I was taken to work to one of the factories in town, I found out that my Aunt, Ida my Father's sister was alive and working in this factory called Kaserniervng. It

was a place where people stayed and did not go back to the Ghetto. And, Ida and her husband were fortunate to work and live in this place on Washington Platz. And, I managed to sneak over there one morning and found my aunt alive and well. She was so happy and surprised to see me since I was the only survivor from the family. She begged the head of the factory, an SS Officer named Scherwitz and also the Jewish Foreman, Rudoff who was running all the departments in factories, and tailor shops. They had shoe makers, mechanics, furriers, etc. etc. And, all these people were working and producing for the Nazis.

My aunt persuaded them to allow me to stay there and not to return to the Ghetto. And, of course I had no trade, I was a young boy and I had studied the violin and they did not need any violinists at that place so they put me to work in the kitchen which was the best place that one could wish to work. There was always extra food. I will never forget that there was enough food left over at night for the people who used to come from different places in town to the back door of the kitchen. They used to beg and line up for the scrapings of the pot and myself and another inmate, Sonja Gottlieb used to climb inside the pot, it was a tremendous big size, and scraped the bottom with our feet and spooned out the burned parts of the cereals and potatoes. It was the best part of the meal. We used to save it and give it to these people that lined up outside. The head of the kitchen, Mrs. Glazer was a wonderful lady. She used to give me extra pieces of bread and that helped me survive for a few months and being a young boy I got my strength back. Of course, that place separated me from my girlfriend, Rita. She remained in the Ghetto and we used to be able to send regards to her through these people who used to line up for food and go back to the Ghetto nightly. We stayed in that place and worked quite a few months. The conditions there were much better than those in the Ghetto.

Once in a while I had a chance to sneak back to the Riga Ghetto with some of those working groups that were going back nightly. I went back there to see Rita and to visit some of my friends in the Ghetto. I took an awful chance but it was my only way of visiting with some of my friends and having contact with my old buddies in the Ghetto. I had no more family left. Most of the boys that I knew from school and from our highschool fraternity were with the Ghetto police. They were the good guys they were not like the Capos and the concentration camps. I was told that they are going to have an eventual uprising just like the one in the Warsaw Ghetto. We had ammunition and supplies and word got out that the Riga Ghetto was going to stand up and fight. Sure enough in a few months, we got word from so many people that somebody in the Ghetto had found out about our underground shelters,

ammunition, guns and what not. And, they lined up all our Latvian, Jewish boys, the police of the Ghetto and they shot them down. We didn't see this but we were told when it happened and every one of them were in the Latvian police, Latvian Ghetto Patrol they were called, were shot and killed. There must have been at least twenty of those boys. And, one of the boys, his name was Siaka Israilowitsch, had got away. He was injured and he was able to escape and he knew about me and another fraternity brother of mine, Abi Rosenstein. He knew we were staying in this building on Washington Platz. He sent his German Jewish girlfriend to inform us about his escape and Abi and I both decided to take a chance and hide him in the attic in our building where we were staying. It took a lot of guts but we were young boys and we knew we had to help. We didn't ask anybody, we didn't ask any of the adults or the supervisors. We decided we were going to keep him in the attic as long as possible and we told his girlfriend to tell him to come across the street to the park and whistle. We had a special whistle that we used to use in our fraternity. At night we snuck out of the building and snuck him in and hid him upstairs in the attic. We kept bringing food and no one knew about this except Abi and myself, but of course, after awhile his parents found out about it and my aunt found out about it and people began to talk and before long Shervitz, the Supervisor, the head of our workplace found out about it and told us that he would have to leave. We kept him there for a few more nights and one morning when I got up we were told that he was arrested by the Nazi SS and taken back to the Ghetto because they wanted more information about what was going on. He was tortured and evidently couldn't take the torture and pointed out the place where our guns, etc. were being hidden in the Ghetto. After that the Riga Ghetto was liquidated and shortly after that the Washington Platz, the place where Stayed was also liquidated and we were transferred to a large camp called Lenta.

The entire factory and all the workshops were moved to Lenta. They had large barracks with bunk beds and it was a concentration camp. There were many more Jews from the Ghetto in that camp and I gave Rita's name to the head of our camp and I was very fortunate that she was able to come and stay in Lenta rather than being sent to Kaiserwald which was another concentration camp. She was put to work in one of the work shops and stayed in the women's barracks. Immediately after we got there all the women were shaved and the men were shaved and they also shaved two inches in the center of your head completely bare to mark us so we could no longer escape. We were also given grey prison clothes and a number and a Star of David on our jackets and the conditions there were, of course, nothing like the Washington Place. I worked in a knitting factory and was able to survive by every

now and then stealing some of the socks that we made, the underwear that we made and traded them to some of the neighbors that used to come around to the barbed wire fence, the Latvian neighbors, and traded some of these goods for a little food.

We had absolutely no hope for survival. We heard about the Russian Front and we heard about the Germans going ahead to Russia and we just felt it was a matter of time. I had made up my mind that every day was a gift from God. I made up my mind that I was eighty-five years old, ninety years old and every day could be the last day of my life.

I carried pictures of my family in an envelope in my pocket that I had taken out of the family album as we were leaving our apartment. And, I used to look at those pictures; pictures of my Mother and Father and my grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins. I lost all of my family within the first few months of the Nazi occupation. I was left entirely alone and the only one I had in Lenta with me was my Aunt, Ida and her husband, Iljusha. Having Rita with me was, of course, a big help. We used to meet after work in the barracks and share food together and ironically in these horrible conditions even tried to make love. But, we were young and had enough strength to survive and go on.

Sometime in the end of 1943 we heard that they would liquidate the Lenta Camp because the Russian front was not holding up as well as the Nazis had expected and they wanted to move us out deeper into Germany. And, they took us in large transports by foot to the pier. They lined us up, we did not know where we were going. Everytime we were lined up and taken from one place to another we thought we were going to be killed, because many times large numbers of inmates were taken out from Lenta by busses and never returned and we knew they were killed. It was always left or right and we just had to be lucky to be in the line of life, but everything seemed so temporary. It always seemed like we were going to be next.

They put us on a freighter and we all laid on the floor on the deck, it was wet and cold, and we were taken to East Prussia to the Port of Danzig and the journey took one day and one night, I think. People were crying and the sick were dying on the boat. The conditions were horrible, there was no food on deck and we knew that we were near the end. We were taken to the concentration camp, Stutthof. I remember getting off the boat and being separated from Rita. They took us on small boats from the pier to the camp and I had still to my belongings a little broken down mandoline and the SS guard on the boat ordered me to play LaPaloma. I played it with tears in my eyes. It was a horrible voyage.

When we were lined up for work in the morning I used to look around to find Rita. She was on one of the other boats that were brought to the camp and I saw her in one of the other lines. When we got there we had to line up, take our clothes off and we were told to go into the shower. Now those showers were not showers they were gas chambers and again it was left, right, left, right and when we got into the showers they did not turn on the showers they just made us walk through it and those who were fortunate not to have been in the line that took them to the ovens, to the crematoriums as they were called, got out on the other side of the shower and there was a pile of striped concentration camp clothes that we had to put on and some wooden slippers and a hat. The first thing that came to my mind was, where are my pictures and I went to the pile where my clothes were and I tried to grab my pictures out of my pocket. One of the guards came over and beat me with the back of his gun and looked at the envelope and when he saw that they were just pictures he just threw them at me, and I was able to carry these pictures of my family through the entire concentration camp years. I still have those pictures in my album. Now we were stripped of everything that we were still able to save and we were thrown into barracks and conditions in Stutthof were horrible. The rations in the morning when we lined up for roll call consisted of a little piece of bread and then sometime during the day you lined up for some watery soup. That was usually in the evening. The capos, they were Jewish inmates that were made into camp police and they were the bad guys. One of the bad guys was Misha Glicksman whom I knew from before the war and he turned out to be a real fink. He was beating the inmates for no reason at all and he was just as bad as the Nazis. When he saw me in line he would come over and ask me for my name. Called me by my nickname, Pimpelchen and smacked me down for no reason at all. He did it to lots of his old friends and people that he knew before the war. In Stutthof there were people from all over the world, Poland, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania. It was an extermination camp and if the war hadn't ended we would have all been exterminated in that camp.

We were taken to work sometimes to the shipyards at Danzig and it was very hard labor. There were also Polish Gentile prisoners that were working there. They had a separate dining room and separate kitchen and their uniforms were just plain grey without any stripes and one day I was so hungry and I wanted to go in, sneak in, the Polish dining room and I turned my prison coat inside out and my hat inside out and I snuck in and got some food. One of the guards recognized me and I was thrown out of that dining room and beaten almost to death with the rifle. We often witnessed a hanging of an inmate at roll call at Stutthof.

When we were lining up for work in the morning I used to look through the barbed wire and try to find Rita, but it was impossible to recognize faces. Everyone looked so horrible. We had all started losing so much weight in the last few months and it was impossible to recognize someone from afar. I would throw little notes in the soup they would carry into the woman's camp and was hoping that she would get my note to let her know that we might be able to go to some other camp perhaps a working camp to be together again, but that never happened. One morning at roll call I was lined up and taken to a place called Burgraben, another small concentration camp that was some hundred miles away from Stutthof. That camp was even worse than Stutthof. The Capo Mr. Glicksman was also there and my days were just numbered. I had lost so much weight and I developed dysentery and I couldn't hold any nourishment in my stomach at all. I would still try to go to work because if you didn't you were put in the death barrack. I once worked in the fields and tried to steal some potatoes that we would take the peel and fry them on our stoves in the barracks and try to eat them at night when we came home from a day's hard labor. I stole a bunch of potatoes and stuck them inside of my pants and then tied the pants on the bottom of my leg. The guard saw me do that and again I was beaten and I had to give those potatoes back. I was also so cold. It was Winter, the end of 1944 the beginning of 1945. It was very, very cold and I found an old woman's coat in the garbage pile and I put it underneath my concentration camp coat. Of course, it was bulging out so much that at roll call I was spotted by the guards and I had to take it off.

In Burgraben I finally got so sick that I was taken to the so called "death barracks" where I was examined by the concentration camp doctors who were Jewish doctors and one of them was Dr. Klebanow who is a prominent doctor now in New York City. Another German Jewish doctor said that I had Typhus and I was supposed to stay in those barracks and left to die. When I heard that Burgraben was being evacuated I got up from my bunk and I joined the rest of the inmates. We had a long walk, a whole day's walk in the cold and snow to Gotendorf which was the last concentration camp that I was taken to. That was already the beginning of 1945. There I was not able to work anymore. I was taken to the death barrack where we were waking up daily and finding some inmates dead. We would keep them there until we couldn't take the smell anymore so we could collect their food rations. And, in those barracks I remember was also my friend, Peter Springfield and his brother Steve Springfield. Every now and then they would send in a so called nurse, someone that was working in the German hospital and she brought coal to swallow and that was supposed to stop the dysentery. I weighed eighty pounds, I was just skin and bones and if this thing had gone on for another month I would have been a goner. I had given up on life and one morning I opened my eyes and looked out of the barracks and there was

an unusual quiet. The Nazi guards were gone. There was nobody guarding us anymore and we heard the noise of machine guns and cannons from afar and we knew that the Russian troops were nearby. I was so sick and I had no strength to run or walk, but the sudden joy knowing that you are almost a free man gave me strength. We all went outside and suddenly saw Russian tanks coming close. Of course, the liberation by the Americans, or British or French would have probably been a much better liberation than being liberated by the Soviets, but we were so full of joy we jumped on the Russian tanks, we kissed the soldiers and the first thing they asked us, "How come you are alive if Hitler killed all the Jews?" It was not a very, very happy welcome. They were too busy fighting the war and they did not bother with us; they just went right on. We were all alone in this burning city of Gottendorf. We walked towards the town and found no one there but empty buildings. I remember walking into one apartment and grabbing any kind of food that I could find. Of course, that didn't take care of my dysentery or sickness and I was getting sicker by the day. I fell asleep in one of those apartments and I remember the Russian troopers walking in with flashlights late at night, looking at me and just leaving me there. I saw Steve Springfield carrying his almost dead brother, Peter and then I lost them. Everyone was trying to make his own way towards freedom. I wound up with a group of our inmates who had managed to persuade a Russian officer to take us to the next village, Torun. They told us to take as much goods as possible; to take clothing wherever we could find it in those apartments and when we got to the next destination they stole everything away from us. They just made us loot the German apartments so again we were left with no belongings.

I finally was taken by a Russian soldier to an Army hospital where I was treated with blood transfusions and glucose and of course, immediately since it was an Army hospital I was asked where I was from, and my age. I was not quite twenty one but I was supposed to be drafted in to Army so I immediately decided I did not want to go back to Russia and I lied and said I came from Poland. Another Polish inmate was in the hospital with me and he told me to say I was his son. He had no son there with him and he briefed me and I told the officials that I came from Lodz, Poland. So after I was brought back to some strength where I was able to move on we got on a transport train. Trains were going in all directions; people were going home. I was wearing a Russian Army coat that I was given in the hospital and I was on the train to Lodz. I spoke Russian and it was not hard for me to understand some Polish and I went to the Jewish committee in Lodz and I told them the truth where I was from and that I did not want to go back to Riga and they directed me to a transport that was going west. My goal was to go to West Germany to the American zone but I had to first work my

way through the Russian occupied countries by another transport to Prague. When I got there I collapsed at the railroad station and I was found in the morning by some Czech civilians who called an ambulance and I was taken to a hospital in Prague. The hospital was called Bulovka. There I was put back to life. I had Scarlet Fever, Typhus, Dysentery, malnutrition and I stayed in that hospital for about a month and then was brought back to life.

At the hospital in Prague I had a chance to collect my thoughts and to remember these horrible years. The anguish, the loss of my family, the conditions we were living in. The lice in our concentration camp clothing, the sickness, the hunger, the cold and I asked myself why did all this happen - why? What was the reason for all this; and I just couldn't find the reason. It seemed so senseless and inhuman and I was just wishing that my parents would have been fortunate like me to survive this horrible crime.

My experiences seemed nothing compared to what millions of people went through that did not survive. I considered myself very, very lucky to have been in the right line at the right time and escaped death miraculously.

And, while I was in the hospital I also tried to contact the Red Cross to find my sister who I was hoping would still be alive in Russia or in Riga. I also had an uncle in the United States who was a famous ballet dancer, Simon Semenov. I knew his name but I had no address. I had another uncle in South Africa whom I tried to contact through the Red Cross. When I got out of the hospital the Red Cross in Czechoslovakia was very, very helpful. They gave me a violin since this was the only thing I remember from my childhood. I was hoping that I would still be able to play the violin. I always wanted to be a musician and I lost the best years of my life as far as studying between the age of fifteen and twenty.

I was trying to find my family in America and South Africa and after a few months I got a notice from the Consulate in Prague, the South African Consulate. They found my uncle in South Africa and he then in turn wrote to my uncle in America and I contacted him and I decided that I wanted to go to America. I was given a violin by the Red Cross and I got a job at this local circus, Kludsky, but that didn't last very long. I went away from this circus; I did not think this was the future for me. I was in the suburbs of Carlsbad, and I ran into a Russian officer who told me that my very good friend Yasha Reitzin was in Prague and he was a big officer of the Czech Army. I looked him up and he helped me go back to Riga to find my family; and it is a long, long story, but I found my sister and my aunt and my cousins. Of course, I didn't stay there. I asked my sister to leave with me. I had phony papers and I had a chance to spend a week with my family in Riga. It was a miracle to

find them alive and they had no idea that I had survived and I, of course, left Riga and went back to Prague the same way we came. It was a Army mission that the Czechoslovakian Army conducted to help the Checks to get out of Russia. My friend, Jasha took me with him as a Check officer and I had a chance to get in and get out. Of course, my sister did not go with me, it was too risky and she wanted to wait for her future husband; she was studying to be a doctor. And then, it took many, many years for us to resume contact. I lost contact with her as it was very dangerous to write to Riga.

I came back to Prague. The revolution took place in Czechoslovakia at that time and the Jewish committee in Prague helped me by foot across the border into West Germany and I wound up in Munich in the D.P. camp. That was the end of 1945. I waited four years for my ~~AMERICAN~~ visa to the United States. I was greeted at the pier in New York by my old friend, Steven Springfield. I went to my uncle in L.A. back to New York and started my musical career. I met a wonderful American Jewish woman, Sylvia, and we were married in 1954. I came to the United States in 1949 and I met my wife, Sylvia in 1951 and we were married in 1954. We had a son in 1957 and we continued living in New York for ten years and then moved to Las Vegas where I have been in the music business every since.

When my son, Paul, was born in 1957 we resumed contact with my sister, Riga and we kept on corresponding but very little, because it was very dangerous to write. In Las Vegas about thirteen years ago we started helping my sister and her family to be able to get out to Israel. It was when the immigration started from Russia to Israel. In 1973 they got out to Israel and we went there, of course, my whole family, my wife and my son, and we had a reunion after twenty eight years. Of course, now we are going back every year to visit the family and make up for lost times.

Our sons are married now. Paul married Lara and we have two beautiful grandsons, Aaron and Joel. Our older Son, Allen married Sue and is living in Las Vegas. He is a very fine architect, and we just hope that our children and our grandchildren will not experience this horrible holocaust that we did and that something like this would never occur again. That the Jews will never be desecrated again. A horrible holocaust like this should never happen to anyone - Jews or non-Jews and I just hope that my experience and my story will have a meaning for the future generation.

Lester Schur



SASHA SEMENOFF

Remember
Words & Music by Sasha Semenoff
Holocaust Survivor

We must always remember;
We must never forget;
We shall always remember;
We shall never forget.

We remember our fathers;
We remember our mothers;
We remember our sisters and brothers.
We remember the children
Who were much too young to die.
Didn't anybody hear them cry?

BRIDGE
But some of us lived to tell the story
And then came Israel in all its glory.

We must always remember;
We must never forget;
We shall always remember;
We shall never forget.

(second chorus to be spoken
as music plays on.)

We remember the young and the old;
We remember the hunger and the cold.
We remember the millions who perished;
We remember the loved ones we cherished,
But we can't remember why
The rest of the world just passed us by.

(back to bridge)

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Note: Sasha Semenoff, the composer of this song, is available to speak in schools. Under the auspices of the Jewish Federation of Las Vegas, Sasha and other Holocaust survivors will share their experiences with students. Call the Holocaust Library at 732-0556 for more information.

THIS SONG IS RECORDED ON MY C.D.
"THE SONGS I WROTE FOR YOU AND MORE"

